

STATE OF NEW HAMPSHIRE
COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF MEN

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Minutes for the Thirty-Second Commission Meeting

January 27, 2007 1-4 PM

Legislative Office Building Room 206, Concord, NH

These minutes were taken by Scott Garman.

Members Present: Joe Mastromarino, Scott Garman, Michael Geanoulis, David Lauren, Gus Lerandau.

Members Absent: Stephen Gorin, Marshall Hickok.

Secretary's Report:

Scott Garman distributed draft copies of the October meeting minutes for approval. David Lauren expressed concern that his request to have the contents of an e-mail he sent to be included with the October minutes was not honored. This e-mail was in regard to condemning personal attacks against Commissioners. Because there was confusion over the fact that such a submission could be included in the minutes without Commissioner Lauren being present at the meeting, it was agreed that the contents of the e-mail will be included below:

Hi All,

Again, I'm sorry that I can't make tomorrow's meeting but I am at the AG's Conference on Child Abuse and Neglect at Waterville Valley.

Even though I won't be there, I want to go on record as opposing the minutes of the August meeting as presented. This opposition is in no way directed at Scott Garman as Secretary - he has been put in an untenable position by the majority of the Commissioners, and that, to me, is unfair to him.

That being said, I request that this email be made part of the official minutes of the October meeting of the Commission on the Status of Men. For the Commission to edit minutes simply because some members of the Commission are concerned as to how a discussion might be viewed in the context of the Commission's continued existence is inexcusable. If the Commission is unwilling to condemn in even a general way personal attacks on Commissioners, and is unwilling to urge both its supporters and opponents to engage in civil discourse, the public should be aware of that by having the minutes clearly reflect it. While a vote is shown as having occurred, the minutes are silent as to the generic, and indeed, compromise statement, being voted on. If the Commission members who voted against a call for civility feel no embarrassment or shame in having done so, they should not be embarrassed or ashamed to have the statement they voted against included in the minutes.

Through no fault of the Secretary, the minutes being voted on do not reflect an accurate representation of what transpired at the meeting, and to vote to approve them makes a mockery of what meeting minutes are supposed to represent.

I ask that the foregoing be made a part of the minutes of the October meeting.

Sincerely,

David Lauren

Commissioner - Commission on the Status of Men

In light of the fact that a voting quorum was not present to approve the October meeting minutes (only those present at the October meeting could vote to approve the minutes), Scott Garman moved to postpone approving the October minutes until next month. Joe Mastromarino seconded, and the motion was unanimously approved.

Meeting Agenda/Organization Issues:

Gus Lerandeau expressed a desire to have the meeting agenda prepared in a more timely manner, and suggested it be released one week before the scheduled meeting. David Lauren agreed with this suggestion. Due to Joe Mastromarino's intense work schedule, Scott Garman offered to prepare the agenda at least one week before the meeting and to distribute it to Commission members.

Term Expirations:

Joe Mastromarino noted that the terms of Scott Garman and Stephen Gorin had officially expired last year, but to his knowledge no one has been nominated to fill the vacancies. According to RSA 21:33-a, Commissioners whose terms have officially expired may continue to serve in their former capacity until such time as a replacement is confirmed. Gus Lerandeau noted that Scott Garman was renominated to the Commission at the last Executive Council meeting (1/24/2007). Joe agreed to contact Stephen Gorin about his term expiration.

Officer Positions:

Joe Mastromarino discussed the need to confirm who on the Commission is serving in which executive officer role. After some discussion, Scott Garman moved that Mike Geanoulis would serve as Vice Chair, Scott Garman would serve as Secretary, and David Lauren would serve as Treasurer. Mike Geanoulis seconded, and the motion was unanimously approved.

Web Site Update:

Scott Garman noted that no changes to the Commission's web site have been made other than noting which months have no forthcoming meeting minutes.

Public Input:

Dr. Stevan Gressit from Unity, ME was invited to speak before the Commission. Dr. Gressit is a psychiatrist, formerly a staff psychiatrist for the Women's Prison of NH, and has done work in corrections facilities and in the field of forensic psychiatry. Dr. Gressit is the founder of the Maine Benzodiazepine Study Group and works heavily on drug abuse issues. He has been involved in the first legislation in Maine to deal specifically with Parental Alienation Syndrome, and was in Concord speaking with DHHS

Commissioner John Stephen to promote legislation (HB1585) that would address enforcement of parenting time violations.

Dr. Gressit stated that in his professional work, he has seen many cases of parental alienation, which is most often directed against fathers. This alienation frequently involves visitation interference against fathers, and he is concerned that the family court system is not recognizing the need for both parents in children's lives. Dr. Gressit described that he has seen in his practice that children of divorced or separated parents are learning the lesson that court orders are not consistently enforced in family courts. The lesson that the court's orders are not respected is then internalized and applied in the context of criminal courts when the child is older and getting involved in criminal behavior. Dr. Gressit does not believe that anyone in law enforcement, in New Hampshire or Maine, has ever enforced visitation orders, and this has made the flaunting of these orders commonplace.

In his practice, Dr. Gressit also noted that he has seen many custodial mothers move from New Hampshire to Maine in order to move their children away from their fathers, a component of parental alienation.

Mike Geanoulis noted that some people have suggested that one way of solving conflict among divorced or separated families is simply to completely remove, or remove as much as is possible, one parent, and that this has been suggested as having a net benefit on these families. Mike wanted to know what Dr. Gressit thought of this.

Dr. Gressit responded by noting that it definitely is not working for the single parents with children which he sees regularly, and that a child having two parents with differing rules and disciplining approaches is generally significantly better off than a single, consistent parent with one set of expectations. Dr. Gressit also noted that parenting groups have been suggested as a tool to help single parents cope with the challenges they face, but that there is no certification process for parenting groups and that they tend to have little consistent quality.

David Lauren asked Dr. Gressit if he had any recommendations of what credentials a parenting counselor should have, and whether the state should consider enacting a licensing body for parenting counselors. Dr. Gressit agreed that a licensing body would be a good idea but that he could not define a set of credential requirements as easily. He did have a person in mind who is likely able to provide that kind of information, and agreed to pass along that person's contact info to the Commission via Scott Garman.

Mike Geanoulis asked Dr. Gressit what he would recommend as the first step the Commission could support to address parental alienation. Dr. Gressit responded that he strongly supports the original version of HB1585, which would make interference with visitation grounds for a DHHS investigation on emotional abuse.

Dr. Gressit also mentioned the following:

* In his experience, he has seen many problems for non-custodial parents in getting any kind of cooperation from schools where their children are enrolled, because school staff members - from teachers, to guidance counselors, to principals - are afraid of getting in the middle of parental disputes over children.

- * New Hampshire is ranked very high in the nation when it comes to Ritalin prescriptions to children.
- * No batterer's intervention program he is aware of in ME or NH will accept female batterers.

Marc Snider and Wayne Wood also spoke about their concerns that the current family court system is harming the best interests of the child and unjustly severing ties between children and their fathers. Marc Snider noted that RSA 633:4 addresses child custody visitation interference, and that he knows of no cases where this has ever been enforced. He asked that the Commission write a letter to various Chiefs of Police in the state and ask them why this law is not being enforced. When Mr. Snider had asked DHHS Commissioner John Stephen about this, Commissioner Stephen responded that it is a criminal matter and should be handled by law enforcement.

Gus Lerandeau motioned that the Commission invite Dr. Gressitt back to speak at greater length, along with his colleague. David Lauren seconded, and the motion was unanimously approved. Scott Garman agreed to follow-up with Dr. Gressitt to inquire about this.

Legislation:

Joe Mastromarino invited David Bickford to speak on current legislative issues. Mr. Bickford mentioned LSR653, which would remove the Commission on the Status of Men's sunset clause, which currently is set for September 2007. The bill would also add funding to the Commission to allow it to engage in further research. This bill is being sponsored by Rep. Laurie Boyce.

Mr. Bickford noted that Marshall Hickok's bill, which would amend RSA 173b, is LSR1105. David Lauren expressed some concern about the way this bill could make telephonic restraining orders unreasonably difficult to obtain, for both male and female victims. Scott Garman stated that he did not believe the intention of the bill was to effectively eliminate emergency telephonic orders, and that this flaw, if it does exist, could and should be fixed with a simple amendment.

There are also three "clean-up" bills, HB93, HB94, and HB195 which deal with child support issues and are sponsored by Karen McRae.

LSR835 is a bill with regard to parental rights and responsibilities, which states that if a judge or marital master deviates from an comparable presumption of parenting time, that he or she must detail in writing why this plan is in the best interests of the child.

The meeting adjourned at 4 PM.